

ORAL STATEMENT

July 17 Farm Bill Hearing

Good morning Chairman Goodlatte and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. My name is Sonny Meyerhoeffer, and I am a farmer with a poultry and dairy background. I currently am a contract grower for the VA Poultry Growers Cooperative in Hinton, Virginia. I also serve on the Board of Directors of the National Turkey Federation, which is the turkey industry's national trade organization.

The turkey industry today is vibrant. American turkey growers will raise nearly 270 million turkeys this year, which will be processed into five billion pounds of ready to cook turkey meat valued at almost \$8 billion. I should mention that Virginia is now the nation's fifth-largest turkey producing state; we raised 20 million birds here last year. The overwhelming majority of those were in the Sixth District.

In many ways, the industry's outlook is bright, but there are challenges that could darken our horizon. By building on the success of the last two Farm Bills, Congress can help our industry successfully handle those challenges.

The biggest key to our industry's profitability is access to a plentiful, reliable supply of feed, which accounts for 70 percent of the cost of turkey production. Turkeys' diets consist of corn and soybeans, with corn being the most critical ingredient. Ensuring a reliable supply of corn is vital, especially in a feed-deficit state like Virginia.

Demand for corn worldwide is on the rise. U.S. corn farmers are aggressively seeking new domestic and overseas markets for their product. Two factors stand out – the increased use of corn as an energy source and China's move from a net exporter to a net importer of grain.

As you write the next Farm Bill, we ask you to remember the singular way in which the last two Farm Bills have helped the traditional feed consumers. By de-coupling support payments and allowing farmers to respond to the growing world demand for corn, we have – in most years – enjoyed U.S. corn crops large enough to fill the needs of new and existing corn consumers. With the legislative mandates for ethanol and Biodiesel production in the coming years, as well as the growing number of products produced from corn and soybeans we must be able to meet the acreage requirements for this production.

But, we also must recognize that the flexibility to plant new corn acres to some extent has come at the expense of soybean acres. In some feed-deficit states, turkey and hog producers are importing soybean meal from Brazil. Unless new arable land is found, more feed ingredients may have to be imported. When writing the next Farm Bill, we ask that you do two things:

- ❑ Maintain the de-coupled payments so that farmers have maximum freedom to respond to market signals; and
- ❑ Expand the arable land available for production by ensuring that only truly environmentally sensitive land is enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program.

Another major challenge is in the environmental arena. We accept the strict agricultural environmental laws of this country as part of our responsibility to be good stewards of the land. Many of you also are aware that some are trying to extend industrial environmental laws to agriculture, and we thank those of you who are working to prevent this.

Whatever environmental rules are on the books, the poultry and livestock producers will need help with compliance if they are to continue to prosper. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), created in the 1996 Farm Bill and expanded in the 2002 Farm Bill, has the potential to help tremendously. In writing the next Farm Bill, we would urge you to:

- Increase EQIP funding to the maximum extent possible;
- Consider increasing the percentage of EQIP funds that are reserved for livestock and poultry operations; and
- Examine ways EQIP funding could be used to facilitate projects that turn animal waste into fuel.

Finally, I would mention three other matters – trade, research and the so-called “competition” issues.

Foreign markets are our fastest-growing markets. The Foreign Market Development program and Market Access Program are vital to increasing exports of value-added poultry and meat. The 2002 Farm Bill was generous to those programs, and we urge you to maintain those funding levels in the next Farm Bill and, if possible, increase them. Each farm export dollar stimulates an additional \$1.48 in economic activity, according to a recent Economic Research Service and USDA study. Also each one billion dollars of agriculture exports adds over 13,400 full-time civilian jobs with over 7000 of those jobs being in the non-farmer sector.

Directly related to this are the competition issues. We face stiff challenges from foreign companies as we seek to open new markets. In addition, the way Americans purchase their poultry and meat has changed dramatically in the last 40 years. Some raise objections to our industry’s current structure, but this structure evolved specifically to meet the demands of our domestic and foreign customers. If we make it impossible for the U.S. industry to organize itself in a way that serves those customers, we can be sure competitors from other nations will step quickly in to fill the void.

Finally, federal agriculture research is a vital to our ability to provide safe wholesome food. Just one example is the Agricultural Research Service’s on avian influenza. ARS researchers not

only have played a vital role in helping U.S. growers prevent the type of avian influenza outbreaks that have plagued Asia, but ARS scientists have helped Asian nations tackle their AI problems. We urge you to maintain and, if possible, increase agriculture research funding, especially in the areas of food safety and animal disease control.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Information Required From Non-governmental Witnesses

House rules require non-governmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Cecil (Sonny) Meyerhoeffer Jr.
2. Business Address: 1386 River Bluff Road
MT. Crawford VA 22841
3. Business Phone Number: (540) 421-0519
4. Organization you represent: Double M Farm
5. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:
30 Plus Years in The Poultry + Dairy
business
6. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:
I have been on Various State and
National Committees serving the AG
Industry
7. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:
owner of Double M Farms

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

Biography for

Sonny Meyerhoeffer
Double M Farms
1386 River Bluff Road
Mt. Crawford, Virginia

Mr. Meyerhoeffer was born and has lived all his life in Rockingham County VA. He grew up on a farm in Mt Crawford where his father and a partner had a turkey breeder and beef cattle operation. After graduating from high school and working for his father three years he decided to start out on his own in farming and with the help of his father they started Double M Farms. Starting in 1976 with a \$15,000 loan and a rented farm from his grandmother the farm raised turkey breeder hens and started milking 10 cows on July 4th 1977. Over the years the operation grew but in 1993 with the passing his father the operation was put totally in the care of Sonny. In 2001 with the operation having at times 900 dairy cows and heifers, 10,000 breeder hens, a trucking operation and some 23 employees the decision was made to leave the dairy business. Till this year the farm was raising crops for the rented dairy and the turkey breeder hens. Sonny has served on numerous boards in the county and state governments and is currently vice-chair of the VA Ag Council. In 1990 he was president of the Young Farmers of VA and has also served on the state DHIA and National DHIA boards. He is a member of numerous farm cooperatives and served several terms on the board of Valley of Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative until it was sold in 1999. Sonny lives in Mt. Crawford Virginia with his wife Marie and their five children

**Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form**

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2004.

Name: Cecil (Sunny) Meyerhoefer
 Address: 1386 River Bluff Road Mt. Crawford VA
 Telephone: (540) 421-0519
 Organization you represent (if any): _____

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do **NOT** require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: _____ ☒

Signature: Cecil E Meyerhoefer

** Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.*

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.